

Ethnographic understandings of ethnically diverse neighbourhoods to inform urban design practice

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Ethnographic understandings of ethnically diverse neighbourhoods to inform urban design practice

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to inform urban design practice through deeper understanding and analysis of the social dynamics of public outdoor space in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. We hypothesise that findings from ethnographic research can provide a resource that improves cultural literacy and supports social justice in professional practice. The primary method is a meta-synthesis literature review of 24 ethnographic research papers, all of which explore some dimensions of public open space use and values in UK urban contexts characterised by ethnic and racial diversity. We summarise thematic understandings and significance of neighbourhood places of shared activity, parks, spaces of passing-by and of retreat. We evaluate the implications for intercultural social dynamics, exploring the spatial and temporal dimensions of conviviality and racism in public open space. We then argue that it is possible to develop principles for urban design practice informed by this work, and propose four for discussion: maximising straightforward participation, legitimising diversity of activity, designing in micro-retreats of nearby quietness and addressing structural inequalities of open space provision. We conclude that ethnographic research can provide detailed insights into the use of the public realm and also inform a more nuanced understanding of outdoor sociality relevant for an increasingly diverse society. The challenge is two-fold: for ethnographers to become less cautious in engaging with decisions and priorities regarding how cities change, and for urban designers to explicitly embed informed understandings of difference into their broad desire for inclusive public space.

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Introduction

This paper addresses the need for intentional cultural competency in urban design, and how this can be foregrounded and supported by a deeper understanding of difference (as argued by Agyeman 2012). We specifically address intercultural dynamics and patterns of use within designed environments, suggesting that notions of sociability in the public realm are too often based on simplistic and homogenous visions of public life and use of public spaces, and lack description or response to the complexity and fluidity of local populations.

Outdoor public space is vital to the quality of life in urban neighbourhoods, and equally the place where everyday practice can most strongly reflect personal and communal cultures of sociability (Dines *et al.* 2006). “Hanging out” is an often unconsidered, banal activity, but the temporal, relational and material dimensions of this can provide important insights into community values within the

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public sphere. Though designers and managers of urban spaces promote the desirability and attractiveness of these as places to spend time, often the reality is more problematic. Shaped by perceptions of difference (racialised, gendered, class and age-related), users are tacitly codified as welcomed lingerers or unwelcomed loiterers (Owens 2002).

In this paper, we argue that a lack of critical understanding of diverse patterns of socialising, and naivety regarding the use of everyday stereotypes, can unwittingly perpetuate professional practices that marginalise the experience of “low-income communities and neighbourhoods of colours” (Zavestoski and Agyeman 2015, p. 7). There are structural inequalities that frame the timeliness of this, and shape the specific focus of this paper on ethnic diversity in public open space.

Wolch *et al.* (2014), acknowledging intersections of ethnicity, race and class, set out the extent by which ethnic background shapes environmental injustices with relation to spatial equity in access to greenspace (see also Agyeman 2013), and these patterns are reflected more broadly in the exclusionary impacts of regeneration (Watt and Minton 2016). These infrastructures are grounded in the local; in reported differences in recreational use of greenspace relating to ethnicity, and how personal experiences of being outdoors are informed by racisms as well as convivial multiculturalism (Wise and Noble 2016). In the UK context, the focus of this paper, the extensive Natural England survey of outdoor recreation (Burt *et al.* 2013) found that people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds made 62% fewer visits to “the natural environment” compared to the rest of the adult population (p. 13), and that far more of these visits (78% compared to 37% for the rest of the population, p. 15) were within an urban rather than rural environment. Yet urban public open space cannot be conceived as an egalitarian zone. British crime statistics over many years reflect that people from all BME groups are at higher risk of personal attack than white people, with a rise over recent years in race and religious hate crime (Webster 2017, p. 208). These bare statistics summarise but do not adequately reflect individual experiences of navigating urban localities, often carefully explored in focused qualitative work (e.g. Nayak (2017) in the UK addressing British Bangladeshi young women). Racialised understandings of public space are explicitly presented in images relating to #blacklivesmatter in America and in mass migration movements across Europe. While academia rightly attends to deep understanding of these dynamics, on-going political contexts require collective action. This paper addresses what this “collective action” may imply for people with professional roles relating to urban outdoor places, and starts to stitch up this gap between the “deep understandings” of academic fieldwork and urban design priorities and decisions.

Planners and designers have a responsibility for “managing our co-existence in shared space” (Healey 1997, p. 3). In an era of increasing diversity, this requires an agility to understand and work within divergent ideas of what constitutes common culture. Mainstream urban design theory and practice are explicitly pro-social: the importance of socialising in outdoor public spaces is promoted (Jacobs 1961, Whyte 1980, Gehl and Gemzoe 1996, Carmona *et al.* 2003) and the benefits for well-being have been well documented (Cooper *et al.* 2014). However, as outlined in the previous paragraph, this goodwill is clearly not enough. While Wolch *et al.* (2014) reason that spatial environmental injustices “warrant intervention” (p. 237) and propose that “the active involvement of urban planners, designers, and ecologists is ... essential”, the regeneration process integral to urban design practice can itself be a vehicle for displacement and increased segregation of people of colour (Anguelovski 2016).

There is evidence for problems both of representation, and of a lack of cultural competency to engender necessary debate and learning. Only 6.3% of registered architects and town planners in the UK are from BME backgrounds, and the numbers are in decline (Creative Industries Federation 2015, p. 10). Professionally accredited curriculums and forums often sideline questions of ethnicity and race. An event in April 2015 on the role of urban design and social equity organised by African American Student Union of Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design highlighted absences within the curriculum, “there are no urban design courses on race and justice” (Mock 2015). In the UK, the situation is similarly colour-blind. Though the annual Urban Design Group conference 2014 headlined a social egalitarian theme “Design for All”, not a single paper or address listed

in the proceedings focused on ethnicity or race.¹ Anecdotally but consistently, professional practices relating to urban design demonstrate a collective disengagement with socio-political urban contexts, the intrinsic impacts of difference, and in particular the differing experiences of public space by people of colour.

Within this broad context of inequitable infrastructures and absences, the aim of this paper is to inform urban design practice through deeper understanding and analysis of the dynamics of ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. The paper initially explores current contexts with regard to cultural competency in urban design practice, policy and scholarship, giving some nuance and detail to the assertions made in this introduction. We then introduce the methodological approach of this study, a comprehensive review of 24 recent ethnographic studies that describe in detail everyday social uses of outdoor space in ethnically diverse urban contexts in the UK. We use a meta-synthesis method to examine these sources. The findings are presented and discussed in three sections. The first section gives a brief overview of the findings organised by a socio-spatial framework, the second conducts a deeper analysis of these with relation to social dynamics of proximity, shaped by both conviviality and racism. The third section highlights the connection between the meta-analysis and professional practice, what can be learnt? We propose four priorities for practice that could have specific and significant benefits within ethnically diverse urban contexts. In the conclusion, we argue that this process of engaging with ethnographic research can be a means of informing design policy and practice, and that findings from ethnographic research can provide a resource that improves cultural literacy and supports social justice in professional practice.

Intercultural competency in current urban design practice, policy and scholarship

In this section, we briefly outline the current situation regarding approaches to ethnic diversity within the urban design field across practice, policy and scholarship.

Though we have highlighted the seeming lack of public discussion of diversity, it could be stated that the local specificity of urban design practice, involving planning processes and different levels of consultation, does respond effectively to the nuances of local cultures. There are multiples critiques regarding the limitations of this process (Sandercock 2003, Healey 2012, Campbell *et al.* 2014, Burayidi 2015) and some of these have particular relevance when addressing contexts with special racial and ethnic dimensions. Firstly, development is predominantly driven by the market, embedded in vested interests, and therefore consultation processes are mostly tokenistic in scope and genuine influence (Swyngedouw *et al.* 2002). Secondly, participation becomes even more contested within ethnically diverse areas, particularly “when the attributes of race and ethnicity are used as fixed identifiers” (Beebejaun 2006, p. 5), and when there is little thought or ambition given to addressing traditional power hierarchies. Thirdly, consultation processes are usually underfunded and therefore often rushed. This has a broad impact on their legitimacy, but specifically is likely to contribute to the marginalisation of commonly unheard voices within planning and design process. Deep understanding is seldom achieved in tight timeframes.

More embedded forms of collaboration with communities do exist and provide some encouragement for reflection of locally specific diversity within urban design. As these gain momentum and critical attention, these have been discussed collectively as creative or design activism, or critical spatial practices (Awan *et al.* 2011). This broad description relates to diverse and heterogeneous groups of practitioners (Hyde 2012, Oswalt *et al.* 2013, Gadanho *et al.* 2014, Kee and Miazzi 2014, Lerner 2014, Lydon and Garcia 2015) who are operating in a wide range of contexts and cultural interactions. At best, these approaches are rooted in specific communities, with interventions often initiated through a local proposing and distilling of ideas. Addressing existing power issues are embedded within an understanding of the need for highly situated, ethical and creative engagement integral to a long-term strategy for change. The projects often engage with ethnic diversity, some more explicitly than others, with the work of Teddy Cruz (USA/Mexico), atelier d’architecture auto-gérée (France) and Marjetica Potrc (Netherlands/South Africa) that “investigate strategies for

responding to underrepresented communities and areas of conflict” (Urbonas *et al.* 2017, p. 1) worthy of particular note in this respect. There is much that can be learnt from these practices; however, the application for mainstream urban design is inevitably limited by the significant timescales required for genuine engagement, the human resources and social capacity required.

Though methods and priorities of working with diverse communities can undoubtedly learn from individual good practice, embedding this in effective strategic policy is crucial for wider scale impact. Race and social justice initiatives in America (Seattle, 2015–2017) or community cohesion strategies in the UK (Department for Communities and Local Government 2009) tend to be spatially dislocated, explored through institutions and vulnerable to changes in the political landscape (Cantle 2016). Predominantly within the US, for example, Project for Public Spaces is a longstanding platform for placemaking that includes some focus on intercultural dimensions of public spaces. Within a European context, the Intercultural Cities initiative by the Council of Europe (2016) is seminal in promoting good practice that rises to the challenge of changing circumstances such as refugee mass movements. However, it is limited in terms of engaging with the local public realm or with professional bodies outside of social policy and governance. A UK focus on intercultural dynamics and local scale was thoughtfully explored in the “Equally Spaced? Public space and interaction between diverse communities” Demos report (Lownsborough and Beunderman 2007); however, this appeared to have had limited influence and impact. This criticism could apply to many of the above initiatives: that responding to ethnic diversity is too often seen as a niche interest, rather than raising a call for institutional change or as shaping core professional skills.

In terms of informing urban design practice, too often the focus of research in urban design, planning and landscape architecture fields (overviewed by Fincher and Iveson 2008, examples Talen 2008, Lawton 2013) is not on the micro scale and the everyday experiences of public spaces. A deeper understanding is needed; one which engages with intercultural dynamics and outdoor sociability within superdiverse urban contexts, which has the ability to connect with socio-political agendas regarding representation and equality, and has the ambition to situate these with regard to practice (Agyeman and Erickson 2012). Research by Hou (2013), Madanipour (2004), Tornaghi, Knierbein (Tornaghi and Knierbein 2014), Rishbeth (Rishbeth and Finney 2006, Powell and Rishbeth 2012), Mehta (2009), Rios (2009, 2015) and Kim (2015) contributes in different ways and contexts (mostly in the US and Europe) to address the broad challenge set out in this paper. However, although individually rich and tending towards ethnographic methods, this work serves mainly to highlight potential than provide a coherent body of research.

In this paper, we look in a slightly different direction, aiming instead to examine the potential of ethnographic scholarship from other disciplines, primarily sociology, anthropology and human geography. Can non-design disciplines, usually unintentionally, inform and support urban design practice? These disciplines are well established and have developed a wealth of urban ethnographies that address intercultural dynamics in a wide range of locations, and, sometimes obliquely, describe the affordances for outdoor sociability. “Ethnography is the major social science with the best hope for throwing off conceptual blinders” (Kim 2015, p. 10). In particular, can publications emerging from these research projects play an important role in developing understanding and improving urban design practice in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods?

Methodology

In this paper, we use the term “ethnography” as a collective term for research using qualitative and situated methodologies. The purpose of ethnographic research is to understand cultures and values informing human behaviour through the use of in-depth case studies (Creswell 1998), and of writing this into coherent and compelling narratives (Back 2015). In this sense, it is a highly appropriate approach for exploring the social dimensions of outdoor public spaces. There is a well-established tradition of urban ethnography, with methods intending to provide rich insights into everyday life, “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973, p. 6), usually over extended periods

of time (far beyond those afforded by a traditional design process), with combinations of detailed observation and interviewing. Increasingly these have been concerned with everyday practices and interactions within localities characterised by ethnic diversity, and often seek to understand aspects of sociability, conviviality, racism, prejudice and adaptation. Significant examples of academics deploying longitudinal ethnographic methods and integrating methods common to design practice such as on-site visual notation, can be found in the work of Hall (2012, understandings of spatio-temporal patterns in a local café) and Kim (2015, mapping and critique of sidewalks in Ho Chi Min City). It seems clear from these studies, and as argued and exemplified by AIGA (2013), Helsinki Design Lab (2013) and Cranz (2016) that ethnographic methods have potential to inform design form. Our focus here is more specifically on systematically and critically exploring the existing ethnographic scholarship of ethnically diverse areas, in order to highlight its additional value for urban design practice.

Developing a meta-synthesis of urban ethnographic urban research

Meta-synthesis is a method of analysis of qualitative material that allows for “bringing together and breaking down of findings, examining them, discovering essential features and, in some way, combining phenomena into a transformed whole” (Schreiber *et al.* 1997, p. 314). In this paper, we present data from recent ethnographic research that relates to the use and values of the public realm in ethnically diverse contexts, as presented in 24 published academic papers (describing 21 discrete research projects). The data within these were recorded and thematically coded, with comparative and exemplar material discussed and contrasted to draw out significance with regard to public space theory and practice.

The criteria for selection of the research projects was that they were: (a) situated in an urban or town context in the UK, with some reference to public outdoor environments, (b) addressed aspects of ethnic diversity and social relations; (c) findings were published within the last 10 years (2006–2016) in a peer-reviewed journal. The research projects typically had fieldwork periods of between one and three years. The national scope of the selection process covered a range of locations, without the challenge of reflecting international complexities in migration contexts.

The findings from the meta-synthesis are presented in the following order, developed using a grounded theory approach to coding of themes:

- (a) Information about how outdoor spaces are used in ethnically diverse contexts. This section describes the data organised thematically by typologies of urban places, focusing on the spatial and temporal qualities of public space use.
- (b) Dynamics of intercultural sociability recorded in these studies. This section addresses dynamics of conviviality and exclusion, and how these are reflected in use of the urban realm.

The final methodological stage is that of evaluation and critical reflection of the process. Our collective expertise as authors, with professional backgrounds in urban and landscape design, and diverse ethnic identities, supported a specialised and incisive approach to this stage. Here we propose “principles for urban design practice”, and then reflect more broadly on the implications of the findings of the meta-synthesis for practice and professional development. It is possible to state that these research projects form an underutilised resource for urban design practitioners? And if so, what are the academic and institutional directions that should be supported in order enable more effective engagement?

Overview of research projects and publications

The 21 projects selected as meeting the above criteria were unevenly distributed across the UK, and broadly reflect locations commonly the focus of research on ethnic diversity. Thirteen of these are

located in London (or include case studies here), and most of the other projects are in large cities primarily in the midlands or north of England, with one study in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland (Figure 1).

We were keen to specifically select research that addressed issues of interactions between groups of different ethnic backgrounds and ages. Approximately half of the projects did this explicitly (for example: Clayton 2009, 2012, Powell and Rishbeth 2012, Rogaly and Qureshi 2013, Wessendorf 2013, 2014) while the others focused on certain characteristics of group and individual identity (ethnicity: Knowles 2013, Clark 2014, age: Clayton 2009, 2012, Reynolds 2013) and interrogated dynamics of difference predominantly through the lens of this particular identity. Whilst



Figure 1. Locations of research projects.

most scoped a geographically defined area, usually a borough or neighbourhood, some addressed particular typologies of urban places, the commercial street (Hall 2015), markets (Watson 2009, Hiebert *et al.* 2015), parks (Watson and Ratna 2011, Neal *et al.* 2015) and even a road junction (Koch and Latham 2012).

The stated focus of the 24 selected papers is varied and includes issues of social cohesion and integration (Cook *et al.* 2011, Clark 2014); conviviality (Kesten *et al.* 2011, Rogaly and Qureshi 2013); experiences, belonging and place attachment of migrants (Philips *et al.* 2007, Clayton 2009, 2012, Reynolds 2013, Rhys-Taylor 2013, Rishbeth and Powell 2013, Neal *et al.* 2015) and street markets and local economy (Watson 2009, Hiebert *et al.* 2015). It is notable that none of these papers are specifically focused on the design of public space. Only three authors included photographs of the places under discussion, indicating a general disinterest or lack of prioritisation with regard to the visual character or spatial qualities of the urban landscape (Table 1).

UK contexts relating to superdiversity and urban space

Our analysis of this research, and the periods of fieldwork in the studies themselves, are shaped by socio-political contexts. While the UK is a country characterised by migration over scores of decades, many urban locations are now described as “superdiverse” (Vertovec 2007) reflecting the increased complexity of population characteristics, interplays of race, ethnicity, length and security of residence, educational and family contexts. Notable terrorist attacks of the last 15 years, both in the UK and in other countries, have shaped everyday understandings of the public realm as a place that has the potential to be dangerous, and this danger is frequently conflated with racial visibility. There has been an increase in anti-migration movements and in hate crime, specifically with respect to people of Muslim faith (Ministry of Justice 2013). These stress points are exacerbated by wider contexts of austerity measures, overcrowded housing and the increase of insecure employment experienced by both low- and middle-income groups (Peck 2012, Watt and Minton 2016). Since most of this research was undertaken, mass movements of migrants from Syria and North Africa have led to an increase in both anti-immigrant rhetoric and multiple acts of collective support (Darling 2016). All of these contexts are relevant because they shape the experience of the public realm: of visibility of difference, of potential communal conviviality and resilience, and as a place of suspicion as well as pleasure.

A socio-spatial analysis of public space use in ethnically diverse locations

This section is the first of two which outlines the findings from the meta-synthesis. This process included a coding of data presented within the papers relating to sites, activities and inter-personal outcomes of use of public open space in the case study sites. This first section is a brief scoping section which focuses primarily on the “where”, describing the spatial and temporal qualities of locations within the public realm that appear to be socially important in ethnically diverse contexts. To resolve these into themes required a balance of precision and inclusivity with regard to typologies, not intending to describe every possible urban environment, but to select those that were discussed in multiple papers and to indicate in the brief headings both qualities of social affordance and of specific landscape quality. These themes are spaces of shared activity, leisure in parks, passing-by and nearby quietness. For each theme we highlight key examples from the ethnographic studies that demonstrate how the physical context and designed intentions of urban spaces shape potential for intercultural interactions to differing extents. This section provides the spatial context for the second section reporting from the meta-synthesis work, in which we address the material with a deeper level of analysis, specifically addressing the social dynamics of intercultural public places, and how these may support conviviality or conflict.

Table 1. Overview of 24 selected papers.

Author/year	Location	Keywords or title (when keywords not provided)	Journal
Cattell <i>et al.</i> (2008)	East London	Public space, well-being, social interactions, social relations, therapeutic landscapes, community cohesion	<i>Health and Place</i>
Clark (2014)	Glasgow	Roma, Govanhill, Glasgow, migration, integration, stigmatisation, welfare, intersectionality, identity, community	<i>People, Place and Policy</i>
Clayton (2009)	Leicester	Multiculturalism, community cohesion, interethnic relations, everyday geographies, identities, belonging	<i>Social & Cultural Geography</i>
Clayton (2012)		Identity, multiculturalism, racism, community, place, youth	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Cook <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Northern UK	A8 migration, integration, neighbourhood, mixing, good relations, everyday encounters	<i>Population, Space and Place</i>
Hall (2015)	South London	City, migration, super-diversity, locality, ethnography, street	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Kesten <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Milton Keynes	Community, diversity, multicuture; new city spaces, ordinary city, Policy, urban spaces, young people	<i>Journal of Intercultural Studies</i>
Knowles (2013)	North London	Visibility, urban space, ethnicity, superdiversity, Nigerian London	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Koch and Latham (2012)	West London	Public space, London, conviviality, matriality, atmosphere, inhabitation	<i>Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers</i>
Koch and Latham (2013)		On the Hard Work of Domesticating a Public Space	<i>Urban Studies</i>
Koutrolikou (2012)	East London	Spatialities of Ethnocultural Relations in Multicultural East London: Discourses of Interaction and Social Mix	<i>Urban Studies</i>
Neal <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Leicester, Milton Keynes and East London	Multiculture, encounter, diversity, public space, public parks, materiality, practices	<i>Population, Space and Place</i>
Philips <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Leeds and Bradford	Leeds, Bradford, British Asians, ethnic segregation, urban narratives, multicultural Britain	<i>Population, Space and Place</i>
Reynolds (2013)	London	'Them and Us': 'Black Neighbourhoods' as a Social Capital Resource among Black Youths Living in Inner-city London	<i>Urban Studies</i>
Rhys-Taylor (2013)	East London	Smell, multicuture, race, taste, street markets, urban	<i>Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power</i>
Powell and Rishbeth (2012)	Sheffield	Place attachment, migration, ethnicity, landscape, United Kingdom, audio narratives	<i>TESG – The Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis</i>
Rishbeth and Powell (2013)		Migrants, ethnicity, landscape perception, public realm, walking methods	<i>Landscape Research</i>
Rogaly and Qureshi (2013)	Peterborough	Diversity, right to the city, regeneration, conviviality, Muslims, EDL	<i>Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power</i>
Rosbrook-Thompson (2015)	Oldfield and London	Belonging, citizenship, denizenship, liberalism, urban sociology	<i>Urban Studies</i>
Selim (2015)	Derry/Londonderry	Derry/Londonderry , contact, social conflict, everyday life, segregation	<i>Cities</i>
Watson (2009)	London, Milton Keynes, Leicester	The Magic of the Marketplace: Sociality in a Neglected Public Space	<i>Urban Studies</i>
Watson and Ratna (2011)	Leeds	Space for leisure, British Asians, intersectionality, thinking intersectionally	<i>Leisure/Loisir</i>
Wessendorf (2013)	East London	Super-diversity; neighbourhoods; London; cultural diversity; everyday multiculturalism; encounters	<i>Identities</i>
Wessendorf (2014)		Conviviality, London, neighbourhood, social interactions, super-diversity	<i>European Journal of Cultural Studies</i>

Spaces of shared activities

Places that are busy with activity are frequently the focus of ethnographic studies addressing ethnic diversity in public space. Here we highlight two typologies of shared activities that were addressed by

a number of the research projects: markets or informal trading spaces, and open air events such as local festivals. The findings suggest that the common purpose and focus on action supports inclusivity and equality of encounter.

Watson (2009) in her research on social relations in market places notes that the “easily sociality” environments of markets is facilitated by the informality of trading relations, the open access but dense interactions of the physical environment, and clear legitimacy of purpose for hanging around. Interaction is intrinsic to the very nature of a market (Cattell *et al.* 2008), and the ongoing “act of civility” that occurs in the middle of the regular trading behaviours is in itself a form of social cohesion (Hiebert *et al.* 2015). Though this is predominantly a fleeting encounter, the repetition and continuity of buying and selling support the possibility for recognition and affection of sorts, allowing a disruption of stereotypes both between traders and customers and between the market traders themselves (Koutrolidou 2012). In Ridley Road market, Hackney, “many described how the market functioned to create social bonds across different ethnicities, particularly between the old Jewish families and more recent Afro-Caribbean and Asian traders” Watson (2009, p. 1586). The opportunity to buy specialised food, the (sometimes touristic) ambience of markets (Watson 2009), and the multi-sensory experiences of smell and taste (Rhys-Taylor 2013) all shape emotive qualities of a pleasurable social environment, and one that can positively reflect the impacts of migration in shaping daily life.

The structured layout and temporal rhythms of market stalls create a density of busyness within a clear spatial order. The integration within market spaces of non-shopping related activities makes them more adaptable and inclusive; with Koch and Latham (2012) highlighting how elderly users enjoy lingering in markets through the enjoyment of being part of a busy environment. Markets are not necessarily, or even usually, permanent structures. Temporary markets, including stalls at a London street junction (Koch and Latham 2013) and car boot sales in Peterborough (Rogaly and Qureshi 2013) offer “low-key” and “inclusive spaces” for practicing togetherness (Rogaly and Qureshi 2013, p. 433) and arguably shape a “domestication of public space” (Koch and Latham 2013). The processes of becoming public (in deed as well as in name) happens through practices of appropriation, embodiment, mutual recognition and working out of differences; these practices are intrinsically shaped, supported or frustrated by the materiality and functionality of the designed space (Koch and Latham 2012, 2013).

Even more flexible and transient than market spaces, the meta-synthesis highlighted the potential influence of festival and event spaces as occasional “encountering zones” (Koutrolidou 2012). Community events are commonly described as exemplars of conviviality (Neal *et al.* 2015) and as a way for different groups to be seen as having an “ethos of mixing” (Wessendorf 2013). In research relating to an event in Leeds promoted for the local British Asian community, Watson and Ratna (2011) argue that the establishment of cultural events that represent specific migrant communities supports being, claiming and belonging in spaces of leisure. They propose that this may increase the active participation of these groups in public spaces through a range of outcomes: developing a sense of community, emerging feelings of place attachment, and fostering a positive sense of identity. However, this does not necessarily reflect intercultural dimensions of socialising in these spaces. Many would claim that that event-based interventions are limited in having an effect in decreasing existing conflicts (Valentine 2008, Koutrolidou 2012), as they are too situational and fleeting to develop social bonds and friendship (Selim 2015).

Parks as spaces of shared leisure

Parks (the predominant typology of “outdoor” recreational places) are shown to be spaces for ethnic mixity and loose social ties, a leisure destination, a place undemanding of a shared language or sustained interactions (Cattell *et al.* 2008, Koutrolidou 2012, Neal *et al.* 2015). Neal *et al.* (2015) specifically focus on materialities and affordances of parks in mediating social interactions and a sense of intercultural togetherness across diverse cultures and ethnicities. A sense of place, emotions and

meanings are evoked by micro-spaces within parks and in turn influence social relations. The ease of mundane behaviours provides points of informal contact: dog walking, play facilities, ice-cream and café queues. Neal *et al.* (2015) describe the significance of parks as places of elective leisure, framed by a shared sense of affection and mutual choice to be there. Parks can be valued as less socially demanding environments compared to markets and shopping streets (Cattell *et al.* 2008); however, organised or specific group activities set within a park do offer opportunities for more sustained interactions. Park-based healthy walk programmes in Sheffield helped recently arrived Pakistani women to become more familiar with their local environment, and casual interactions with older women on the walks provided opportunities for “intergenerational bridging” (Powell and Rishbeth 2012). Neal *et al.* (2015) describe how exercising in parks is increasingly popular across different ethnicities and “doing this activity bring together ethnically different participants, the park setting, the things in the park, as well the physicality of exercising and produce a series of interactive micro-material and social intimacies” (p.471).

Locations for children’s play and sport venues are spaces of encounters shared for a particular purpose. Spontaneous encounters in these places have the potential to result in social ties and friendships over time; not only for the active participants in play activities but also for the supervising parents (Cattell *et al.* 2008, Koutrolikou 2012). The collective use of space and the overlap of interests can bring together new and established communities and are sometimes especially valuable when integration is implicit rather than explicit (see Mayblin *et al.* 2016 for discussion of a football league integration initiative in Poland). However, Clayton (2009) discusses how the spatial and material characteristics of a fenced football pitch, referred to by the young participants as “the cage”, became a site of conflict over the ownership of space among young users of different ethnic backgrounds in Leicester. We revisit spatialities of exclusion in a later section.

Streets as spaces of passing-by

Streets are the immediate areas of the public realm in which differences are encountered outside of the home. The linear spatial quality of streets, frequency of connecting nodes and acts of movement all shape a different kind of affordance for social interactions. Cattell *et al.* (2008) describe the serendipitous casual interactions that happen during everyday activities walking to school, work, running and walking dogs in passing-by spaces of streets, the epitome of the fleeting but with potential to be repeated. Streets can be sites of common courtesy, or of a seeming lack of it, as judged by a Jamaican woman in Sheffield “Greeting people was important to her, and she missed the importance given to the manners in Jamaica” (Rishbeth and Powell 2013, p. 170). Both of these research projects underline the regularity and continuity of walking along local streets to support a sense of familiarity and sense of local belonging. Transcultural connections can also be important for first-generation migrants, catching echoes of a past life in the city bustle or in glimpses of nature (Cattell *et al.* 2008, Rishbeth and Powell 2013).

The visibility of walking in a neighbourhood is mostly incidental but may be strategic or even political. Selim (2015) discussed how symbolic walks are performed as a sign of integration in a divided city in Northern Ireland as outward projections of an intended togetherness. In places where street presence is associated with problems, the intentional use of this visibility as a stage to demonstrate a different narrative can be a strategy of resilience, as detailed in Glasgow context where stigmatised Roma migrants organised clean-ups of their local area (Clark 2014).

Spaces of retreat and nearby quietness

“An Indian woman was frustrated by the absence of places to sit down (such as cafés with outdoor tables) on her local busy shopping street, her fleeting exchanges with long-term acquaintances could never turn into more meaningful encounters” (Cattell *et al.* 2008, p. 554). Where in the city is it possible to extend these incidental connections? A spatial detail observed across a number of papers was

the importance of quietness nearby to busyness as a condition for developing sociability. Cafés with outdoor seats close to shopping streets, or situated within markets, allow a place of retreat but with the affordance of allowing visible and audible connection with a flow of people (Cattell *et al.* 2008, Watson 2009). Other micro-spaces such as benches located near the playgrounds and informal sitting spaces such as packaging cases or stairs are spaces to start or to continue conversation near the crowd (Watson 2009, Neal *et al.* 2015). The porous edges of public and private spaces give opportunities for interaction while feeling the security of being near home: “for a middle-aged mother on a housing estate ... the front drive provided temporary relief to her routine as a place where she could sit down and have a cup of tea with her neighbour” (Cattell *et al.* 2008, p. 550).

Intercultural social dynamics in outdoor places

This is the second section relating to the findings of the meta-synthesis. We now address more specifically the different social dynamics at play, focusing on how these are shaped by the particularity of the urban context.

Knowles (2013) in her conclusion to the geographies of Nigerians in London suggests that “urban spaces in which superdiversity can be visibly articulated sustain an active co-presence of urban citizens in proximate worlds”. Visual permeability, the design quality of openness of outdoor public environments, supports “seeing and being seen” enabling mutuality of presence. Who passes by and what they are doing (fumbling for bus money, cheering up a child, carrying shopping) allows for a fundamental human to human emotional connection not reliant on conversation (Koch and Latham 2012). The loose solidarity engendered by this appeared to be strengthened when locations were places of elective leisure, such as parks (Neal *et al.* 2015), festivals (Watson and Ratna 2011), football pitches (Clayton 2009) or markets (Watson 2009). Other users, however, seemingly different from the viewer, are temporarily and tacitly defined as “insiders” through this shared choice of place or activity. Cattell *et al.* (2008) in east London and Rishbeth and Powell (2013) in Sheffield both link this visibility (often foregrounding the visibility of multiculturalism) with the process of deepening place attachment, an affiliation and sense of belonging within a located community.

Visibility can lead to familiarity. This can be conceived as moving from a reading of difference as “other” to a “commonplace diversity” in which multiculturalism of population is an unconsidered norm (Wessendorf 2013). But, more relevant to design scales is the dynamic (reported across many studies) of serendipitous fleeting conviviality also perceived by participants as supporting integration? “You do get to know people [when jogging], not on a deep level, but if you saw them down the street you’d say hello. And that’s the beginning of a community” (Cattell *et al.* 2008, p. 553). Intermittent mundane contact is not usually location specific – it can happen along a street, in a bus, in a shop – but chances are increased when a location is busier, when there are established temporal patterns of use, where there are nodes (paths crossing or points of gathering), and where the atmosphere of the space is relaxed rather than stressed (Koch and Latham 2012).

Authors often made reference to Putnam’s framework of bonding and bridging (2000) in being specific about qualities of ethnic integration – in which “bonding” describes interactions within a known group, and “bridging” describes interactions between groups. Was there evidence for outdoor situated encounters that bridged the difference, especially in ways that might be conceived as meaningful and going beyond the fleeting? Certainly more frequent reference was made to bonding social connections, developing and strengthening relationships within a group with some aspect of common identity. This seemed most common with relation to youth networks (Clayton 2009, Reynolds 2013) but also seen by clustering of social groups of different ages and backgrounds in parks (Neal *et al.* 2015) and in habits of elderly Yemani migrants sitting on benches outside the Mosque in Sheffield (Powell and Rishbeth 2012). Conversely, though there were many examples of bridging conviviality and loose ties, for example conversations at markets (Watson 2009, Hiebert *et al.* 2015), the literature very rarely offered any specific instances of these fleeting encounters developing into ongoing friendships across ethnic groups. The only times this dynamic was specifically

noted (still somewhat inconclusively) were times and places related to sport and exercise: playing knockabout football (Clayton 2009), and more organised group activities such as fitness bootcamps (Neal *et al.* 2015) and healthy walking (Powell and Rishbeth 2012). While it is important to note this lack of specific evidence, it does not necessarily negate the broader thrust of the collected findings in representing the importance of the public realm for ongoing sociability. Incidental and serendipitous encounters of the kind noted in local public spaces will mostly not instigate friendships, but they may be an “important positive precursor” (Phillips and Robinson 2015) instrumental in developing from acquaintance to friend, and providing a means by which cross-cultural bridging capital is strengthened.

While noticing the points of common connection, it is also important to pay attention to places where the visibility of ethnic identities may influence or re-enforce private prejudice (Valentine 2008). The urban condition of “the being together of strangers” (Young 1990) is inevitably shaped by notions of self and others, and often reflects broader stereotypes, especially in contexts of personal unease. One of the strengths of careful ethnographic research is the chance to hear from disparate voices about the dynamics and effects of “being in public”, and gain a better understanding of how these are shaped by the values of the “viewer”.

What is often socially constructed as morally reprehensible and anti-social for non-Roma is actually seen as being social, hospitable and inclusionary by Roma themselves. For example, “loitering on street corners” is actually socialising with friends and “improper” rubbish disposal is actually forms of recycling and income generation. (Clark 2014, p. 8)

Wessendorf (2013) in her study of Hackney noted the importance of an “ethos of mixing”. Cultural defined groups (not exclusively ethnically identified in this research) were judged negatively as not wanting to mix (Orthodox Jews and Hipsters) compared to groups viewed more positively (Turkish and Vietnamese). This perception was shaped by the visual presence (or absence) of a low-key participation, often simply a “turning up” in community and commercial interactions, local shops, schools, playgrounds and summer fetes.

The findings of the meta-synthesis highlight the relevance of location as well as identity being important in developing perception, and also to the impact of this on free movement and equal participation in public space. Clayton (2012, p. 1674) asserts “identities and everyday opportunities are constrained by the requirement for BME [Black and Minority Ethnic] young people to negotiate and adapt to dominant spaces of whiteness” (Nayak 2003, Back 2005). This is reiterated in the findings across the papers examined here, many of which reflect stigmatisation and fixing of identity based on class and socio-economic status (Skeggs 2004). It is not surprising that groups at the bottom of these hierarchies – in the UK these might commonly be identified as young people, black, Muslim, new migrants – are those who are most vulnerable to being “othered” and impacted by the lived experience of prejudice enacted in urban spaces (Garner 2007).

There was clear evidence of “avoidance strategies” (Van der Burgt 2015) being used by people who felt negatively judged by their visibility in certain spaces across the city. These can reflect entrenched political and cultural divides, as described most poignantly in the Northern Ireland normalisation of ethno-national territorial landscapes “our kids can’t use that park. Any time they try to use it they’re stoned out” (Selim 2015, p. 21). The street as a place of public gaze was important as a staging of cultural values; Powell and Rishbeth (2012) noting a young Yemeni woman as feeling judged when walking in particular residential streets “because there are a lot of Arab men and women always looking you and judging you ... seeing if your scarf is on properly” (p. 77). Ethnic background or racial appearance is commonly combined with age and gender to inform perceptions of safety or unsafety. “Women, particularly Muslims, felt especially vulnerable when walking in public spaces, commenting that ‘you get hassled’, ‘targeted’, ‘picked on’” (Philips *et al.* 2007, p. 230). Being isolated was also commonly cited as a problem, with people from non-white backgrounds worried about relocating to, or even passing through, predominately white neighbourhoods where they felt more exposed to a racist gaze (Philips *et al.* 2007, Clayton 2009, Powell and Rishbeth

2012, Reynolds 2013). Parks and greenspaces, though valued by many, were also cited as problematic localities, probably due to the low levels of use which can make users, especially young people, feel vulnerable to hate crime (Cattell *et al.* 2008, Clayton 2009).

Throughout the synthesis of the research papers, drawing together accounts of very different localities and diverse groups, it is possible to evidence and give life to some simple, but often overlooked, understandings for urban design. The use of public space reflects the heterogeneity of society: “normal use” or a “normal user” does not exist. People are perceived differently relating to intersections of gender, racial and ethnic, age and class identities. The experience of these stereotypes and judgments over time can contribute to practices of segregation in spatial and temporal terms. However, conviviality and incidental participation in the outdoor public realm can have a double benefit, to establish a sense shared humanity of everyday life between two or more people, and in giving visibility to others of a commonplace diversity that shapes new ideas about local belonging.

Ethnography informing design practice

We argue that these understandings can and need to inform practice. We suggest that engaging with ethnographic research, as represented by this meta-synthesis, does give some direction for priorities, which we outline below. Undoubtedly these need to be tested and refined with regard to local contexts. These are not intended to be only of relevance in ethnically diverse locations; on the contrary, they describe broadly applicable good practice. But we suggest they are especially important in areas of high ethnic diversity, whether in urban neighbourhoods historically shaped by migration or areas of new housing, and are one way in which planning and design practice can improve intercultural connectivity and combat inequalities in the urban realm.

Firstly, support activity in the public realm that allows for low-barrier, straightforward participation. Many of the times and places that were notable for conviviality with and among strangers were places of purposeful doing, and the actions associated with this were simply understood and undemanding. Markets, playgrounds and sports facilities allow people to play clearly defined roles (shopper, parent, footballer), alongside others but without requiring extensive conversation. A parallel can be drawn with findings of positive intercultural engagements in commercial chain cafes (Jones *et al.* 2015); the relative uniformity and codes of behaviour of these establishments allows for easy expertise and equality that appears to support a sense of shared experience. Though we hope outdoor places would not aim to emulate the blandness of corporate branding of chain cafes, these spaces shape an interesting challenge for thinking through how people from diverse backgrounds can easily do something alongside each other in public environments. An appropriate planning and design approach may be to identify busy locations in the city or neighbourhood, and examine how the first step to participation may be made easier.

The ethos of the “public” in urban space also gives affordance for something often limited in indoor spaces, diversity of activity. Participation in public space may be varied: paddling in fountains, people watching, photo taking, lunch eating, reading, playing sport, shopping, resting, listening to music, smoking, drinking, skateboarding, mending cars, using phones, doing homework, running, walking dogs, barbecuing, tai chi, cycling, waiting. So, secondly, management approaches should legitimise different uses of public space wherever possible, recognising leisure as socially constructed, and in nearly all instances reflective simply of different forms of socialising and relaxation. Co-locations of multiple activities, with thoughtful design to address possible practical conflicts, can help engender the dynamic of elective leisure (Neal *et al.* 2015) and a shared awareness of everyday multiculturalism (Wise and Velayutham 2009).

Thirdly, maximise the potential of the edges of busy places to provide opportunities for micro-retreat, thus enabling longer conversations. The research suggests that fleeting positive encounters happen in diverse areas where there is ongoing movements of people, especially taking into account repeated temporalities such as work commutes, shopping habits, school day routines. Busyness is

useful for spontaneous encounters, but *nearby quietness* gives an invitation to extend that encounter, an exemplar here may be a café located in the market (Watson 2009). This may be a pocket park near a school, or simply a well-positioned bench (Bynon and Rishbeth 2015). It may mean paying attention to making attractive the nodes within the flow, bus stops, stations and the entrances to buildings such as supermarkets and libraries. Strategic allocations of resources for high-quality environments should prioritise these connections and affordances, and ensure they are safe to use.

Finally, by focusing on planning, design and management for pleasurable places of encounter, is there a danger of neglecting the challenge of inequality? More intensively managed, higher quality public spaces are generally located in more affluent neighbourhoods rather than the typical urban areas of settlement for new migrants characterised by disadvantage and stretched service provision (Phillips and Robinson 2015). People from non-white backgrounds are more likely to be victims of crime, and therefore, more likely to make choices about how to use public space based in part on previous experiences of racial harassment (Clayton 2012, May 2015). These are entrenched issues, and while the built environment professions cannot address them in isolation, there is a requirement not to exacerbate the problem, and to think creatively where changes might have the most impact. Perceptions of hanging out as problematic, for example Roma people “loitering on street corners” (Clark 2014, p. 41) or Kurdish men clustering in a derelict garage (Powell and Rishbeth 2012) may be gradually addressed if places of seating are available which are clearly attractive, hospitable and designed for gathering in groups. Resource allocation should seek to right historic inequalities with regard to scarcity of resources (even if that resource is prosaic a ball playing cage (Clayton 2009)), so that the need for local competitive behaviour is reduced. Equally, reducing crime (or perceptions of crime) is not unrelated to the provision of pleasurable places that encourage lingering across different sectors of society, age, gender, class and ethnic background. Busy places with diverse activities, flows of users and high levels of visibility and people watching provide Jacob’s “eyes on the street” and improve safety for all (Jacobs 1961).

Conclusion

In this concluding section, we review the significance of the above findings, reflecting on the strengths and limitations of engaging with ethnographic research to improve cultural competency in the built environment professions (Agyeman 2012). There are provocative challenges. It is reasonable to argue that ethnographers are too cautious in engaging with the potential, politics and practicalities of changing urban places, that they draw back from a means of curating and communicating their research for decision-making. They appear to be wary of being seen as deterministic or simplistic, unable to state, even provisionally, how their in-depth expertise may provide valuable learning in broader professional contexts. Equally, a general enthusiasm for socially focused design (e.g. Gehl and Gemzoe 1996) can lead to complacency among landscape architects and urban designers, a serious lack of criticality. It is not appropriate to promote parks as cheerful melting pots of diverse friendships and shared leisure without also addressing issues of intimidation and racially motivated hate crime.

The scope of this paper can be framed as a call for ethnographers to consider the influence their research may have with regard to urban design. Our methodological process demonstrates that data from ethnographic research can be of high value in refining questions, shaping priorities, and sometimes informing the detail, of urban design practice. We note that the focus of our inquiry was often significantly different from the aims of the original research, and would have benefited from being able to access information and contexts that that ethnographers do not necessarily find meaningful to highlight in their published research; the most significant example of this is the need for visual information regarding the spatial qualities of discussed places such as parks. This critique offers an opportunity in institutional settings in which the applications and “impact” of research are increasingly foregrounded (in the UK context this is now embedded in the Research Excellence Framework (Khazragui and Hudson 2015)). Clearly the findings need to become accessible, curated and

communicated with a view to an applied relevance; and the academics themselves are unlikely to be able to independently make these judgements. Strategic collaboration between ethnographers and built environment academics (or practitioners) can serve to capture, focus and share rich data and offers the former the intellectual challenge of explicitly engaging with the future shape of urban areas.

In this paper we proposed four principles for practice: maximising straightforward participation, legitimising diversity of activity, designing in micro-retreats of nearby quietness and addressing structural inequalities of open space provision. In formulating these, demonstrably derived from the meta-synthesis data, we suggest it is possible to “stick your neck out” – not to claim universality but to start a discussion on decisions and priorities that can be engaged with beyond the local. It is an argument both for the importance of the form of physical design, and that ethnographic findings can constitute a first step in the process of designing inclusive public spaces. There is a need to better embed ethnographic methods into urban design education, learning from disciplines such as sociology and anthropology the importance of explicitly engaging with cultural difference, inequality and power relationships. Over time this supports development of the cultural competencies of urban design professionals (Agyeman and Erickson 2012, Rios 2015), and shapes a professional body engaged and skilled at responding to the cultural complexities shaped by globalisation and superdiversity across different scales of the urban environment.

In calling for collaboration, we also affirm the need for urban design ethnographers, the need for research methods and questions to emerge and be shaped within urban design and landscape architecture scholarship. Currently exemplified by some of the academics listed earlier (Hou, Mandipour, Mehta, Rishbeth, Rios, Kim and others), the scope and ambition of work needs to be expanded and given more strategic impact within professional bodies, educational centres and pan-national organisations. Academic research in this area is often connected with practice, and there are clear benefits to engaging with multiple case studies across different contexts to move away from perceiving ethnic diversity as a “fringe issue”. The Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, (SkuOR, Austria²), which focuses on international and cross-cultural perspectives and exploration of unique local cultural, social and professional practices offers one relevant model.

We finish by reiterating the need for an authentic professional engagement with ethnic difference and changing population profiles. In thinking through dimensions of racial and ethnic diversity in public space, it is important to recognise the potential of convivial encounters while not turning a blind eye to seemingly entrenched power structures. For too long, these dynamics have been overly simplified, with a cultural dimension largely missing from critiques of sociability in public space, and a failure to recognise racial inequality in public space access and use. We suggest that it is ethical, timely and relevant to debate how urban and landscape design can play a vital role in a more culturally competent and socially equitable society.

Notes

1. Conference programme: <http://www.udg.org.uk/events/urban-design-all-toward-life-less-ordinary>
2. Institution website: <http://skuor.tuwien.ac.at/en/about/structure>

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